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DEFENSE ISSUES

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National Guard and Reserve forces already help state and local governments during all types of natural disasters. Now, DoD plans a new assistance mission -- helping out after a attack involving weapons of mass destruction.

Volume 13 Number 29

Integration of Reserve Components Responds to New Threat

Remarks by Deborah Lee, assistant secretary of defense for Reserve affairs; Robert M. Walker, acting secretary of the Army; and Brig. Gen. Roger Schultz, deputy, Director of Military Support, Army Operations Center, Washington, March 7, 1998.

Lee. We are here today to unveil what we believe to be a very important initiative regarding our nation's ability to respond to the possibility of terrorists' use of weapons of mass destruction right here on U.S. soil.

Defense Secretary [William S.] Cohen said just a few hours ago in a presentation before the National Press Club, these deadly weapons of terror constitute a growing threat worldwide. The end of the Cold War, the breakup of the Soviet Union and the increasing global nature of our economy have made it easier for terrorists and criminal networks to possibly acquire such weapons, and so that's why we feel we must prepare to deal with the consequences of the possibility of such an attack involving chemical, biological or radiation weapons should that attack occur here at home.

Now, the steps that we are beginning today, specifically the announcement of a new plan to use our Guard and Reserve forces in this fight as well as the establishment of a Guard and Reserve consequence management program integration office, will advance our overall capabilities to support local, state and federal civil authorities in the event a WMD, weapons of mass destruction, type of incident should one day occur.

As you know, DoD has been a player in this realm for some time. We have been very heavily involved in implementing what is called the Nunn-Lugar-Domenici city training program, which is working to train local first responders in 120 of our nation's largest cities. We're training local fire, police and emergency medical personnel on how to deal with what could be catastrophic effects of a weapons of mass destruction incident. Now, this program, we think, is getting good results, but we feel that we can do more. So the program that we are unveiling today involving our Guard and Reserve forces is designed to complement these ongoing Nunn-Lugar-Domenici efforts.

Secretary Cohen has made it quite clear that he wants the Guard and Reserve forces, our part-time military forces, front and center when it comes to DoD's response to terrorist attacks or the possibility of such attacks here at home. Why the Guard and Reserve? Because they live and they work in all of our communities. They know the lay of the land. They have established links to the fire, police and emergency medical personnel who are always the first responders when something occurs here at home.

All Guard and Reserve forces already have significant capabilities to support state governments in all types of disaster response. And indeed, our National Guard, in particular, has a long history of such service. The goal now is to take that baseline, to take those capabilities and then adapt them to the requirements of consequence management for weapons of mass destruction. Our Guard and Reserve forces, consequently, will soon receive additional training and equipment to prepare for this new mission.

Now, I want to stress that this is not a DoD mission alone, and it is certainly not a Guard and Reserve

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mission alone. But rather, what we're talking about is the use of DoD assets to support local, state and federal civil authorities. During any such incident, DoD, again, would be in a support role, not the lead role. Rather, the Federal Emergency Management Agency would retain its lead federal agency response position under such a scenario.

Now, this is a very, very big and important job. Should the unthinkable occur and should a weapon of mass destruction actually be used, responders, be they local, state or federal, will confront very unique and very daunting challenges. Survivors of an incident will need medical assistance. It will need to be immediate and it will likely need to be massive. Survivors will need information on where and how to get help. Specialists will have to identify the nature of an attack and restrict access to hazardous areas. Others will need to come in and decontaminate those areas. And rescue and medical personnel will need to perform their missions without themselves also becoming casualties. So like I said, it's a very big job.

Here's how we propose to do it: At its core, the plan foresees the initial establishment of 10 rapid assessment and detection teams. These teams will be comprised of 22 highly trained, full-time National Guard personnel. And each of the teams will be tasked with a rapid response mission. They're designed to arrive quickly on the scene of an incident and they will be able to help local first responders identify the nature of an attack and call in as follow-on forces the right kinds of support. These teams are designed to form the tip of our national military support and response spear.

Complementing and supporting these teams will be specially trained and equipped decontamination and reconnaissance units which will be drawn from existing Guard and Reserve force structure currently located across the United States.

Now, we've budgeted almost \$50 million dollars in the FY [fiscal year] 99 budget to begin this program of training and equipping and standing up these teams around the country. They will report through the Director of Military Support, up to one-half of whose staff will soon be comprised of personnel from the Guard and Reserve world.

This plan, I will tell you, has been a very collaborative effort between our active, Guard, Reserve and civilian leadership. And indeed, under Secretary Cohen's leadership, I just want to note the presence here today of Ambassador [H. Allen] Holmes, our assistant secretary for special operations and low intensity conflict. He is the keeper of the Nunn-Lugar-Domenici program here in DoD. We also have [Army National Guard Lt.] Gen. [Edward D.] Baca, our chief of the National Guard [Bureau], [Brig.] Gen. [James R.] Helmly, chief of the Army Reserve, we have Maj. Gen. [Russell C.] Davis, the vice chief of the National Guard Bureau, [Maj.] Gen. [Edward] Soriano, the director of DOMS [Director of Military Support], and many others. Again, this has been a very, very collaborative effort and all of these individuals participated in the tiger team that helped to develop this concept for using the Guard and Reserve for this mission.

And so now, if I may, I'd like to turn the podium over to the chair of this effort, the chair of the tiger team, acting Secretary of the Army Mike Walker.

Walker. Thank you very much. ... I keep on my desk a jagged piece of glass which the FBI gave me from the childcare center in the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. I keep it there as a reminder of what can happen in America. One hundred and sixty-eight people died that day in Oklahoma City. But 5,000 would have died if that bomb had been a chemical weapon. So that is what we faced with the potential of weapons of mass destruction.

As you know, the secretary of defense has named the Army for a number of years to be the executive agent for military support to civil authorities. That has traditionally focused on the assisting the lead federal agency, FEMA, in responding to forest fires and floods and hurricanes and earthquakes and the like. When Congress passed the Nunn-Lugar-Domenici program, ... to train up to 120 cities in responding to domestic terrorism from weapons of mass destruction, the secretary named the Army to be the executive agent for that program [and] to proceed with the training.

And then last fall, he asked us to look at the potential of improving the ability of the Guard and Reserve to assist in responding to weapons of mass destruction. I established a tiger team ... under the direction of Brig. Gen. Roger Schultz, who is the deputy adjutant general from Iowa and is currently serving as the Deputy, Director of Military Support, in the Army Operations Center.

Gen. Schultz pulled together elements from all of the services, from all the reserve components and from OSD [Office of the Secretary of Defense]. And he also carefully coordinated the preparation of the report with our interagency partners and especially our lead at FEMA. In addition, he carefully consulted and the Tiger Team carefully consulted with state and local officials to find out what they needed most as we put this effort together.

Now I will call on Roger Schultz in just a moment. But let me say that this is a very serious subject. The experts tell us that it's their view that it's not if, but when, a weapon of mass destruction will be used in this country. So it is very important that the American people believe that their governments, at every level, are doing everything possible to prepare for that potential. We believe that the program that Secretary Cohen announced today is a step in that direction. ...

Schultz. Secretary Cohen's announcement earlier today regarding the nation's preparedness for weapons of mass destruction response underscores the Department of Defense interest in improving our ability to respond to these attacks. And I'm going to talk for just a minute about the detail that Ms. Lee and Secretary Walker have already introduced. And as I do, I'll provide, then, the detail that we anticipate the Guard and Reserve becoming a part of, in terms of our overall response efforts.

And we're talking about a support role that Ms. Lee has already introduced. ... We talk about the Guard and Reserve and our role of supporting our nation's response disasters, to domestic emergencies. And so the theme of our work is integrating the Guard and Reserve, the theme of our work is a support mission that Ms. Lee has already introduced initially here. ...

This past November, we assembled a group of experts to look at the military requirements to support a response to weapons of mass destruction attack. And so we looked at the military functions, you'll see at the top, and outlined, then, the integration that's already mentioned briefly. And for certain, we talked about the program definition, the tasks that obviously would fall out of that mission statement in terms of the detail that we in the military, the Defense Department, in this case, the Guard and Reserve, might be asked to perform. So we looked at the interagency strategic plans and we looked at the other requirements that the Guard and Reserve could be tasked to accomplish. ...

Interagency to us, our federal partners -- the FEMA, FBI, the Public Health Service, the Veterans Administration -- are the kinds of agencies that we feel we have an interest and an obligation to be a part of in terms of response. ...

And as you work down the list, as it relates to the Defense Department's ability to respond, we find ourselves today, not prepared. And I'll talk about that in just a little more detail. Not prepared with the likes of the description of the missions that we may be asked to react to. And so, you'll hear today our concept, our plan, on how that program comes together.

The more important piece ... I think, really deals with the task -- train and equip our Reserve component response elements -- ... shaping and focusing the Guard and Reserve training efforts and equipping the Guard and Reserve units to respond to a WMD-like attack. And so, you'll find that to be a significant part of our concept in our overall interest.

One of the things we found in our study is that we need to practice more with our interagency partners. Working with the state government, working with the local government, and also then, the federal partners here. And so, we say it's not just establishing a program where we go out and train the military, it's establishing a program where we exercise with the state responders, the local responders and the federal government.

So as we talk here about coordinating the procedures, the office we're announcing today begins to

coordinate those activities overall and that's the detail that I'll provide here as we continue with the briefing. So this is the program we're standing up. This is the office that will be in existence here from this day forward relating to, overall, coordinating the consequence management program activities. ...

We possibly could have local responders and state responders and federal responders reacting to the same incident, ... and it's our recognition, in the case of the Defense Department, that we support a local incident commander. So our idea is that a fire chief remains in charge ... throughout the mission, the fire chief would remain an incident command kind of responsibility.

And recognize that as the state response comes together, this is the governor's authority to bring the National Guard and other state resources to bear, that they too would have a chain of command. And as well, the federal responders would then come in with the other task force that are follow-on force in nature that would also have their own separate chain of command. So our challenge is to bring together these three response activities into a weapon of mass destruction response.

What's this all mean? What we're saying is that a weapon of mass destruction attack is different in the sense that the state forces could be overwhelmed earlier than ever before, and as well, we may need to call in the federal assets. So it brings to bear, perhaps, a reaction time that we have never before anticipated in terms of Guard and Reserve reacting to day-to-day mission requirements. ...

The state coordinating officer is the person that responds to the governor of the various states and territories. And so, beyond the control of a local commander perhaps being overwhelmed on the scene fairly early, we would have a state response force coming together. And we recognize that the federal activity needs to be coordinated, in this case, by the FEMA, or the Federal Emergency Management Agency ...

What we really want to do, though, is make available DoD resources to the local incident commander. ... The person says I need these kinds of activities. ... We, DoD, are not as prepared as we need to be [for] a weapons of mass destruction response. We have limited capabilities, in fact. ... Our current capabilities -- explosive ordnance disposal, laboratories and the tech escort unit.. The Marines have the CBIRF [Chemical-Biological Incident Response Force] model many have talked about for some time -- that represents today's DoD capability for response to WMD-like attacks. ...

We need to focus. We need to equip. And the Guard and Reserve units represent these areas or these functions today. And that's our task. That's the program that we're announcing today, ... to take these activities and these type support requirements and put them together in terms of a response activity. ...

So the teams that we are talking about are rapid assessment teams and we've already heard about at least 10 teams being fielded in fiscal year 99. The team missions. ... One is rapid deployment. One is early-on assessment of a given incident -- what kind of agent are we dealing with, where's the cloud or the plume that's perhaps been used on a given incident site, and perhaps where are those in danger, where do we need to secure, where do we evacuate from, or perhaps, where do we keep people from entering? And so, all of those missions come together here in terms of this assessment element being a part of that overall command and control activity.

I say "all of this" -- we still are responding to a local incident commander's request. We, the Department of Defense, are responding to a local incident commander's request. ...

Long term, we are here to say that we have a commitment to sustaining the skills. You'll see that in our plan in terms of the detail, in terms of the rest of the activity[,] as it isolates task, train and equip responders. And so our program today is perhaps the first step of a journey that begins to use and capitalize on the Guard and Reserve being considered for weapons of mass destruction response. ...

[Excerpts of selected questions and responses follow.]

Q. Where are these 10 first teams going to be located?

A. The 10 Federal Emergency Management [Agency] regions. We'll put a team in each of these regions, and we are considering a list of criteria that factors in the likes of the population centers and a number of other factors, the local military training centers of excellence, that are available. ...

Q. But where in the regions?

A. Well, that's the model we're working through right now. ... It'll actually be May before we identify the actual

communities that will receive these teams.

Q. You talk about 10 teams, but then you break down your FY program and [say you'll have] 65 decon [teams] and 28 recon ...

A. [The] 10 teams [are] structure that's new to the force. The rest of the teams that we're organizing are found in the Guard and Reserve today ... that need some training, need some focus on their task and need some equipment.

Q. The problem you have with Guard and Reserve personnel is they have real jobs, most of them, and they do other things which might not make them available for instant mobilization. And yet, you're talking about being able to [put these people] on the scene within hours, I would imagine. Isn't that a complication?

A. Yes, it is. ... Your question is, can we get there in time? And the answer is, our plan is to start with 10 teams and then simply test that model or validate the response concept and develop from there.

Q. Those rapid teams, those are full time people, right? Or no?

A. The teams that are announced today, yes, have a full-time staff, a full-time contingent and a traditional member contingent. Their 22 members are the full-time spaces, and there are an additional 22 members for traditional. So it would be a 44-member platoon if you just took the model and applied it to a given mission.

Q. What would the threshold be for sending one of these teams out? We've had a couple of incidents in the last year. We had the one in Las Vegas just recently. I doubt that gets to your threshold because nothing happens. Or we had the thing in Washington where there was sort of a mysterious package that could have been a biological agent. That doesn't ring your bells, I guess, probably.

A. They absolutely do. They ring our bells. In fact, the team that we sent from Dugway, Utah, to Las Vegas was approved through our office. That chain of command that I talked about... has Mr. Walker in the approval process. And yes, we have to approve those teams responding to a mission; in this case, the FBI led. So it absolutely rings our bell. And it turned out that the agent was not what was announced initially.

Q. But that Dugway team is a regular Army team, is it not?

A. Yes, that's a regular Army team as part of the tech escort unit.

Q. I assume that they would still get the first call in most of these cases unless there was an individual case, or is that not true?

A. I think in terms of the decision making in terms of who gets the first call is where the teams are located and the response time that simply would be applied to get there, I do believe. And so we've gone through an analysis of just the question you're asking. How quick can I get there? And so the regional teams are a start point for us.

Q. As I understand, you have Dugway people and on the East Coast, you have Fort Detrick [Md.], or

something. Would this be sort of decentralize it to more places so you can get there faster?

A. The tech escort unit really exists in three locations today, so they've already been decentralized some. What we have potentially in the case of weapons of mass destruction attack is we just simply may not have the forces in the right places. And so the Guard and Reserve begin to shore up that response capability, that potential. And they're stationed across the country today. And so it places a response potential that's closer to the sites that potentially that could be attacked.

Q. What actual evidence do you have that the threat is increasing?

A. The FBI actually has the lead on the domestic threat. ... One of the things that we're preparing for is an item that Secretary Walker talked about, and that is, we may, in fact, be attacked. If you look at terrorist activity worldwide, we are simply preparing for a mission that may come, may arrive. We obviously listen to the FBI on a routine basis, so that we get an update on the threat assessment as the activities occur. We monitor the threat in terms of how much ... and the activity really -- the FBI has release authority on that kind of information.

Q. What's the additional cost once you get geared up of running this outfit per year?

A. First year cost, as Ms. Lee pointed out, was \$49 million. That's the start up, the equipment and the training. We anticipate that to be kind of an annual cost as we go into the program.

Q. \$49 million a year indefinitely?

A. We're developing next year's budgets right now, and so it's obviously a program we have to defend and justify as we go through the budget review process.

Q. Let me ask you something to clear something up. These 10 teams would [be] Army National Guard teams, right? But draw on other National Guard units?

A. Right. ... These kinds of elements, these capabilities are found in the Guard and Reserve today; these elements, if they're Guard units, can be called by the governors and are routinely called today.

Q. These would be Army National Guard.

A. Army or Air National Guard -- both ... respond to the governors in the states and territories today. There are Reserve capabilities that could be authorized for response by the president.

Q. But the 10n teams that you're forming will be both Army and National Guard.

A. Army and Air National Guard teams. Which gives us that accessibility. That's where the governors' authority to call their subordinate units to come to bear, which allows for a quicker response.

Q. Back to the budget, what pot of money will this come out of as you get rolling?

A. Secretary of Defense Cohen has announced a commitment of multiyear dollars to the program. What we're realizing in terms of first-year costs are a part of that overall commitment. This is all DoD money that he's applied to the mission.

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